

BLOOD-SUCKING MONKEYS FROM



NORTH

TONALAND

• STORIES BY CRAD KILODNEY •

PERSON
THOMAS
MILES 89

BLOOD-SUCKING MONKEYS
FROM NORTH TONAWANDA

Stories by

Crad Kilodney

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CHARNEL HOUSE

Toronto, Canada

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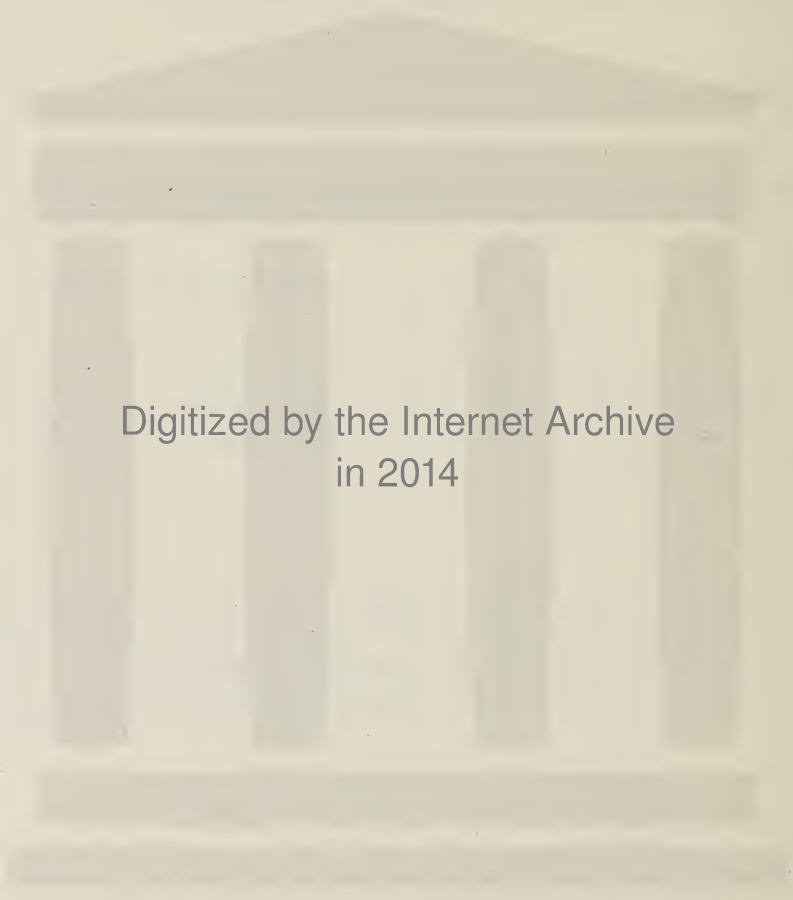
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CONTENTS

<i>BLOOD-SUCKING MONKEYS FROM NORTH TONAWANDA</i>	5
<i>MY DATE WITH ALAN EDMONDS</i>	22
<i>HAPPY-GO-LUCKY TIME</i>	38
<i>THE MAN WHO DIED OF HIS OPINIONS</i>	46



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BLOOD-SUCKING MONKEYS FROM NORTH TONAWANDA

Lolita screamed as the sharp yellow fangs sank into her nubile young flesh, bloodying her skimpy bikini, which fell in shreds to reveal an innocent body that had not yet known the pleasures of love. The lust-crazed monkeys, driven to a frenzy by the smell and taste of her blood, bit and clawed her and howled as only monkeys can in the throes of mass bestial rape. Twenty of them were upon her at once. To resist was futile. Soon her body could scarcely be seen beneath the animated blur of brown fur covering her. The bull monkeys assaulted her every orifice with their swollen, throbbing organs, and their fangs chewed mouthfuls of flesh from her breasts, thighs, and buttocks....

So begins our story, "Blood-Sucking Monkeys From North Tonawanda." I'm sure you will agree that it is the most exciting beginning to any story you have ever read, and one that allows for many sensational possibilities. For instance, will there be lurid scenes of monkeys invading the girls' locker room at Erie Community College? Will helpless old people in wheelchairs have their heads ripped off at a Polish picnic? Will there be Ninjas? Will there be Jesus?

Perhaps this is a good time for you to stop and think about your motivations for reading this story. Are they entirely pure? Are you perhaps motivated by an unhealthy appetite for prurience? Are you pretending to make a scholarly study of filthy, smutty literature? Do you believe that underneath the facade of a silly horror story there may be deep intellectual ideas? Are you a moralist determined to read this story to the end just to confirm your worst suspicions about the depths to which popular culture has fallen? Are you merely determined to get your money's worth since you've already paid for the book? Or have you led a sheltered life until today and have just had your interest aroused for the first time in all forms of salacious filth?

Regardless of your reasons, you are forgiven for contin-

uing to read this story. You see, through extremely skillful literary artifice, I've made it impossible for you *not* to finish it. There is no power on earth that can prevent you from reading all the way to the end once you've gotten this far. (Technically, the point of no return was reached with the word "filth" at the end of the previous paragraph.) You are in my spell, so to speak, and it's a good thing, too. For just as a mosquito bite is more harmful if you swat the little beast before he's removed his stinger, this story would be more harmful to your mind if you were to stop reading now. You would be subject to restless nights filled with cold sweats and horrible dreams, and your family, friends, and co-workers would notice that you had become, shall we say, *disturbed*. You might even be transformed into a crazed psychopathic sex criminal, like those who work at the Ontario Film Censor Board or for the Customs branch of Revenue Canada. You might even lie under oath, park your car illegally, or refuse to rinse your stockings out in the evening. However, we've agreed that this is purely academic as you've committed yourself to continuing.

I'm going to take a break for a coffee and a cheese sandwich, but the story will still be here, so you just keep reading, and I'll join up with you again in a couple of pages to see how you're getting along.

"I always bring my dates here late at night," said Patti, as she sat down near the edge of Tonawanda Creek. "There's something about the creek, the way it smells, the way the water looks in the moonlight. And they say that weird monsters hide in secret places along the bank and come out at night. The Indians used to tell stories about furry animals with sharp teeth and glowing eyes that roamed in packs. They were sort of ape-like....*Maybe they're watching us now!*" She pulled Sandra down on top of her, and both girls broke up in giggles. Patti dug her fingers into Sandra's ribs, causing her to curl up in a fetal position to cover herself. Patti was strong and athletic, with small but firm breasts and powerful legs. Sandra was soft and submissive with huge, well-shaped breasts that she emphasized by wearing tight sweaters. Patti quickly got her hands under Sandra's sweater and undid her bra. Sandra pretended to resist, but her pussy was already wet with anticipation. She longed to feel Patti's body all over hers, their lips meeting in burning desire, their fingers digging beneath each other's

panties and manipulating each other's clits.

"Treat me like a slave," moaned Sandra. "Treat me like a piece of meat."

With a few skillful motions, Patti stripped Sandra of her clothing and then stripped herself. Then she pounced on Sandra, holding her arms down while sticking her tongue deep into her mouth. The cool earth beneath Sandra's back contrasted with Patti's hot flesh pressing upon her, and their bodies writhed with a passion known only to teenage dykes and Peruvian vampire bats. The powerful, domineering Patti pressed her pussy on Sandra's and she frottage-fucked her squealing, willing partner as the two clits swelled and each nerve ending sizzled with electricity. "I love you, I love you," moaned Sandra over and over. Patti's reply was but a deep, throaty growl of desire. She stuck her tongue into Sandra's ear, driving the girl into a near-epileptic spasm. Sandra turned to lick her ear as well. Patti laughed sensuously and said, "I'll give you something to lick!" She turned around and planted her pussy on Sandra's mouth while spreading Sandra's thighs to feast hungrily on her pussy. The two lovers soared into the stratosphere of pleasure on their missile of hot flesh. This was ultimate bliss.

And it did not go unnoticed by the band of bloodthirsty primates huddled behind the nearby bushes. Their nostrils flared with excitement as they sensed the hot pheromones radiating from the two steaming bodies thrashing in their sugary cesspool of lust. And as the two girls reached the crescendo of passion, exploding in orgasm, the insane mutant monkeys leapt from their hiding place and threw themselves upon the girls. Patti turned instinctively to meet the threat and tore one furry arm out of its socket, but she could not fend off the savage bites that came at her from all directions. Despite her valiant efforts to save herself and the girl she loved, she took a fatal bite in the neck that severed a large artery and fell choking and gasping for air. Sandra was so paralyzed with fear that she never rose from the ground, and the fangs of the monkeys tore through her sumptuous breasts and buttocks. The screams echoed over the murky water of Tonawanda Creek but went unheard....

Engorged with blood and flesh, the monkeys crept across the bridge that led to...ERIE COUNTY, the county of the proud city of Buffalo, whose Mayor, the Honorable James Griffin, was asleep in bed dreaming about playing an electric flugelhorn at the Tralfamadore Cafe. County Parks Commissioner Joe

Martin was booing at him to get off the stage, and Jimmy slugged him in the jaw.

...Hi, I'm back. I had a very nice Swiss cheese sandwich on light rye with a little mustard. We writers do our best work late at night, and naturally it's hard to resist raiding the fridge. So, how goes the reading? I can see that you're very excited after that scene with Patti and Sandra, but you're a little angry with me for having them killed off. I know, I'm sorry about it, too. I sort of identified with Patti, but never mind, let's not get psychoanalytical. This isn't *The White Hotel*, by D. M. Thomas.

Okay. So the monkeys have crossed the creek into Erie County. I had to do this because the creek separates Erie and Niagara Counties, and I sort of wanted to push this story into the county where Buffalo is located, purely for commercial reasons. It's kind of odd that whereas North Tonawanda is in Niagara County, Tonawanda is in Erie County. This was the most surprising fact I learned in researching this story, so I thought I would pass it along.

At this point I have to take care of an obligation. There's a woman I know named Marina, who has been nagging me for two years to write a story about her and me having sex. I've been mulling this over and have finally decided to work her into this story. I'll admit it's kind of embarrassing because she's married. In fact, I know her husband quite well. But I don't think he'll beat me up or anything.

As the house lights went out and a red spotlight lit up the centre of the stage, the patrons hooted and clapped in anticipation of the famous stripper Marina. The sound system blared out a trashy melody and the curtains parted. Marina stepped forward, clad in the skimpiest black gauze top and g-string and twirling a feather boa. The author of this story sat in the last row following every bump and grind with a mixture of desire and melancholy. Yes, I desired Marina, but what chance did a guy like me have? A woman like her must have so many men in her life already, it would be foolish to try to make it with her. So I just sat there watching her do her routine. She took her sweet time stripping completely, for she obviously enjoyed her work. There were more beautiful women dancing in this dump, but Marina was special. Maybe it was just that she reminded me of one of my Sunday School teachers.

After Marina's act was over, I watched one more stripper and then left the club and stood outside wondering what to do next. As I considered the possibilities, who should come out the door but Marina herself! On an impulse, I said, "I loved your act. Can a poor writer buy you a drink?"

She looked me over for a second or two and, to my surprise, replied, "A writer, eh? Okay, you can buy me a drink."

I hesitated momentarily because I didn't know the neighborhood too well. "I'm from out of town. I don't know where to take you."

"I know a place," she said. And putting her arm through mine, she guided me along the main street.

We turned a corner and went into a dimly-lit place, nothing too fancy. We sat in a booth and ordered drinks.

"What do you write?" she asked me.

"Stories. Most of them are funny, although sometimes they're pretty disgusting."

"I read a lot of poetry," she said.

"Are you familiar with the works of Minnie Dalton?"

"Of course!" And then she assumed a dramatic expression and recited this poem:

*Little crumbs on the sea--
Trying hard to be free,
Forgotten are their cares--
Will someday think of thee.*

*Little crumbs ride the waves,
Hear the sounds from the deep;
Beneath the restless waves
Are loved ones asleep?*

*Little crumbs, listen well,
There is something to hear,
There is a whisper sweet,
Bring it to someone dear.*

*Little crumbs on the sea
Trying hard to be free
Music comes from the deep,
Crumbs of comfort for thee.**

"I think I'm in love," I said, spilling my drink.

She put her hand on mine. "You're so sweet," she said.

* Reprinted without permission from *Crumbs of Comfort*, by Minnie Dalton, 1973, Exposition Press, New York.

"But I ought to tell you I'm married."

"Oh....Where is your husband?"

"He travels a lot. He's a germ warfare expert. He spends a lot of time in those Arab countries."

"Sounds interesting," I said uncertainly.

"He used to work for the CIA, but now he's in business for himself."

"Where'd you meet him?"

"In the Christian Science Reading Room in Washington, D.C."

We had a few drinks, and then I escorted her to her room at the Holiday Inn. It was there, boys and girls, that an adulterous sexual act took place, which I now deeply regret. God gave human beings the sacrament of marriage so that husbands and wives should cleave to each other only. God also gave human beings bubonic plague, although the reason remains obscure.

By 2 a.m. Marina began to show signs of pregnancy. By 4 a.m. she was in labor. At 4:15 the fetus was expelled. It had three legs and deformed arms and died almost immediately. "Don't feel bad," I said to her. "These things happen."

"It's okay," she replied. "I'm used to it."

The author left her and returned to his cheap hotel in the bad part of town, where he wrote the first hundred pages of an epic novel of loneliness and desolation. The next afternoon, while he was asleep, the maid threw it out with the garbage.

On Delaware Avenue between Tonawanda and Kenmore, New York State Troopers discovered a school bus on the side of the road, its driver and forty children horribly mangled. They were from a school for the deaf and had been on their way to an Iron Maiden concert at the Buffalo Auditorium. All the blood had been drained from their bodies. The troopers also found a large dead monkey that had apparently been run over. From this evidence they concluded that drug-crazed devil-worshippers had stopped the bus and slaughtered its occupants, and the monkey was an escaped circus animal that just happened to be crossing the road. This false conclusion was to lead the police investigation astray for several days (leading to the arrest of numerous innocent people, I might add) until a pathologist noticed a correspondence between the wounds on the bodies and the unnaturally large fangs of the monkey. Further consultation with experts from the Buffalo

Zoo led to the discovery that the dead monkey was a mutant of a type never before seen (in Western New York, at least). A police department cleaning lady remembered the other cases of blood-drained bodies, and this put the detectives on the right track. They reviewed all recent cases of people found dead under similar circumstances, including

THOMAS F. MIKLEJN, President of the Whirlpool Athletic Association,

DAN BAZANI, former Councilman and head basketball coach at the State University of Buffalo,

DARYL JOHNSTON, who led Syracuse University to a ranking among the top 20 college football teams in 1988 and to a bowl victory over Louisiana State,

DEBBIE COWELL, of Wheatfield, who had the second-best batting average in women's Division I softball in the United States,

RAYMOND F. GALLAGHER, of the Horizons Waterfront Commission,

MARIS BATTAGLIA, director of the American Academy of Ballet in Williamsville,

PAUL BATT, of Paul Batt Buick, 1717 Walden Ave.,

JANE M. HARRINGTON, Human Resources Dept., M&T Bank,

ED KELLY, book reviewer for the Buffalo News,

and MR. AND MRS. CARMELO PARISI, of Cheektowaga, and established that they'd all been killed by blood-sucking monkeys. But you already guessed as much, didn't you?

I've just received a letter by courier from a Ms Snurk or Snurl (I can't quite make out her handwriting) of Toronto. The letter accuses me of "species discrimination," whatever that is, and this person goes on to say that I'm defaming monkeys and *"demonstrating a kind of hatred toward living creatures rarely encountered outside the laboratories of certain sadistic butchers who slaughter animals in the name of science."* And she says that monkeys do not suck blood or attack people or have sharp fangs or even eat meat. Well, this lady is obviously one of those animal rights lunatics, the same sort of idiots who throw rocks through the windows of McDonald's or march around in front of Alan Cherry's store on Yonge St. during his annual fur coat clearance (and I'll just

say quickly in passing that McDonald's is one of my favorite places to eat, and Alan Cherry is a model businessman who lives by the credo "Always sell the best, treat the customer fair and square, and keep the store clean, and you got nothing to worry about"). Ordinarily, I wouldn't interrupt a major literary work to answer such a stupid letter from someone who has never bought one of my books anyway, but I just want to get the scientific facts straight. First, monkeys do attack people sometimes. Second, they do have sharp teeth and can eat meat if they want to. Is Ms Snurk or Snurl in a position to say that no monkey has ever eaten meat? Monkeys have worn hats, smoked cigarettes, played ping-pong, and received votes in presidential elections. After that, eating meat is nothing. And once you accept that premise, it's a short step to drinking blood, because all meat contains blood, okay? Now, I'm not telling the reader that he's supposed to hate monkeys (although I have no use for them personally and wouldn't go out of my way to help one across the street), but if monkeys are so harmless, why are they kept in cages? And remember how those monkeys at the beginning of *2001: A Space Odyssey* learned to beat the shit out of their enemies with bones? I think you get my drift. And on the subject of species discrimination, Ms Snurk or Snurl, if you're implying that we should not regard any species as superior to any other, then tell us *how many animals you've fucked!* Or perhaps you prefer GREAT BIG BANANAS!

Okay, enough on that. I'm sorry about the digression. Fortunately, I can see I haven't lost anyone.

Rumors began to spread among the media when very important people were seen going in and out of Buffalo's City Hall. Usually only unimportant people went in and out of Buffalo's City Hall, so it looked as though something big was happening. When a press conference was called, there was no longer any doubt of it. Reporters crowded outside the press office demanding to know what was going on.

"Why is the Army sending troops into the Buffalo area?"

"Yeah, and a Marine regiment! What's happened?"

"Why a special press conference at 5:00 on a Sunday?"

"Gentlemen, you'll just have to wait!" said the besieged press officer.

"Why all these VIP's from Washington?"

"Has the Cold War gotten hot?"

The door opened, and Mayor James Griffin barked, "Gentle-

men, come in now!"

The reporters crowded into the Mayor's office, where they found several men in uniform seated at a table with numerous microphones. Several civilians were also there. They all looked sober and serious, even the ones who had recently been drinking. When the excited buzzing of the reporters had died down, Mayor Griffin addressed them: "Gentlemen, you've been called here to be informed about the most serious crisis this city has ever faced. There's no time for questions. Please listen carefully so that you report the facts accurately to your news media." He pointed to the men seated at the table. "This is Dr. Harold Medford of the Department of Agriculture...General Robert O'Brien, Air Force Intelligence...General James, Army Intelligence....The others you know." He then spoke to a man standing before a TV camera that had been set up in advance. "Are you ready, sir?"

"One moment, please." He in turn addressed the cameraman. "Are you set, Charlie?"

"You're on."

The announcer faced the camera and read a written announcement: "We interrupt all radio and television programs for an indefinite period. Please keep your radio and television sets turned on. This *is* an emergency. I repeat, this *is* an emergency."

The camera then centered on General O'Brien, who read his announcement into the cluster of mikes: "By direction of the President of the United States, in full agreement with the Governor of the State of New York and the Mayor of Buffalo, the City of Buffalo is, in the interests of public safety, hereby proclaimed under martial law...." An audible wave of confusion swept through the room, momentarily interrupting the General. "Curfew is at 1800 hours. Any persons on the street or outside their quarters after 6 p.m. tonight will be subject to arrest by the military police....Now as to the reasons for this most drastic decision....A few days ago in the vicinity of North Tonawanda, large mutant monkeys were discovered. These monkeys are similar in characteristics to the zoo or jungle varieties you are familiar with, except that they are mutations that attack people, eat their flesh, and suck their blood. One has been found dead. The rest are believed to be at large in Erie County. It is not known how many of these lethal monsters there are -- maybe a few, maybe...*thousands*....These creatures are extremely dangerous. They have already killed a number of persons. Stay in your homes.

I repeat, stay in your homes. Your personal safety, the safety of the entire city, depends on your full cooperation with the military authorities...."

As the sirens of police cars and military vehicles filled the streets below, the reporters snapped their tape recorders off and jammed the doorway to get out and file their stories.

County Executive Dennis "Big Kielbassa" Gorski muttered to Mayor Griffin, "We should've done this in my office."

"This office is nicer."

"It is not."

"It is too."

"Next time it's my office or I won't come at all."

"Cocky-doodo-head!"

"No, *you* are!"

On a bench in Sheridan Park in Tonawanda an elderly man was feeding bread crumbs to pigeons. Nearby, an 8-year-old girl was making bubbles with bubble soap. He had been watching her for several minutes until finally there were no other adults around. "Little girl!" he called to her. "Little girl!"

"Yes, Mister?"

"Come help me feed these pigeons. Come." He held up his bag of bread crumbs.

"Oh, can I?" She skipped over to him happily and accepted the bag.

"Just toss the crumbs a few at a time....There, that's it...." The pigeons cooed with delight. "My, that's a pretty pink dress."

"Thank you. My mother bought it for me."

"How nice. Where is your mother now?"

"Oh, she's at work."

"Good. I mean, that's nice....And what pretty shoes you have on. And what pretty socks."

"Thank you."

"Come closer. Don't be afraid." His smile was so sweet. He was just like Grandfather. He even smelled the same. "Let's play a guessing game, all right?"

"Gee, that'd be fun."

"Let's see if I can guess what color your panties areLet me think....Are they pink?"

"No! They're white!"

"Am I wrong? Oh, dear, how could I be wrong? Perhaps

you're fooling me."

"No, I'm not." She lifted her dress. "There, see? They're white."

He reached out to touch them. "Oh, they're so pretty. They look awfully expensive."

"No, they're just regular ones."

"Can I see the label? You can tell a lot from labels... Let me just look in the back there....I don't see any label. Maybe it's in the front." He put his hand between her thighs and rubbed her crotch gently. "What soft, pretty skin you have, my dear....There, does that feel good?"

"Um...no...I mean, yes...um...."

"Yes, it feels good, doesn't it? Let's go into the bushes, shall we? If you go into the bushes with me, I'll give you a big surprise. I have it right in my pocket."

"Um...um...I better not...I don't think...I...." The bag fell, scattering crumbs all over the ground. The pigeons cooed loudly with excitement.

"Want to see my finger disappear inside you?"

"Ow!"

"Don't be afraid. It only hurts a little at first. In a few seconds it'll feel wonderful...heh, heh...heh, heh...." A gob of drool fell from his mouth. "Now we'll go into the bushes, heh, heh...."

Suddenly, a sound of thrashing branches made him stop. He looked around. Out of the bushes staggered Irv Weinstein, Channel 7 Eyewitness News, blood pouring out of his neck! "AAAAAAUUUUGGGHHHHHHH!" he screamed and then fell dead.

A cordon of Army infantry, Marines, and police surrounded the park. It was night. Searchlights stabbed the darkness as all eyes watched intently for the first sign of the enemy. The air itself seemed charged with electricity. Walkie-talkies and radios crackled. Generals pored over maps. Soldiers checked their weapons. One private unwrapped a stick of gum for himself and one for his buddy. A police officer tightened his belt an extra notch. A cub reporter hitched up his undershorts. Parks Commissioner Joe Martin picked his nose. An auxiliary policewoman poured coffee into styrofoam cups. An ambulance driver retied his shoelaces. Another soldier lit a cigarette. Another police officer fiddled with his keys. A professor from U.B. played with the square root button on his calculator. Dr. Harold Medford wiped his glasses. An Army chaplain picked lint off his

sleeve. This kind of nerve-shattering suspense went on for ten pages in the first draft, but most of it has been deleted here, as you can see.

Suddenly...it happened!

Uhh...never mind...no, it's okay, forget it...I meant to, uh, no, sorry, nothing...never mind, I'm sorry...never mind.

If this story is in any way unsatisfactory to you, then the thing to do is stare at the print intensely until your eyes fall into the white space and get stuck. I recommend this especially on public transport, where you will seem to others to be in a state of extreme concentration even while you are in a state of utter oblivion. Even now people are watching you and thinking, "This person is quite seriously immersed in a book called...um, what's that?...*Blood-Sucking Monkeys From North Tonawanda*...by, um...Crad...Kilodney?... Hmm, this must be a very deep book of considerable literary weight cleverly disguised as a trashy horror story. And the person reading it is obviously no fool. He has a mind." Meantime, you are in fact blocking out everything because you can't fathom the story at all. Especially that last part where something evidently happened but the author refused to say what. And what was Irv Weinstein doing in the bushes in Sheridan Park?.....Now your mind is wandering.....It often does when you're reading on the bus or subway, doesn't it? Why can't you concentrate? Are you getting senile? Do you have...*a mental problem*??? Perhaps you're thinking of what to have for dinner, or whether you'll have sex tonight (or ever again), or whether you should call your mother, because she always complains that you don't call her often enough. When she's on her deathbed you'll feel plenty guilty for not having called her, so make a mental note to do it.... Now I think you'd better turn the page, or else others will become suspicious of a reader who seems intelligent but fails to turn a page for the longest time. I also have my credibility to think of: people mustn't be allowed to get the idea that my books are boring or hard to read.

While Erie County was gripped with terror, the hero of our story landed at Buffalo International Airport on a private jet. He was the mysterious crime-fighter of Upstate New York known as...THE BAT. Though few had ever seen him, he was the stuff of gossip in every police department north of

New York City. Newspaper files on him were sketchy, referring only to an unknown man in a bat-like costume, sometimes armed with a club, appearing at night to cause inconvenience to criminals. For instance, in Elmira, he let the air out of the tires of a car belonging to an alleged gangster.* In Ithaca, he punched a candy store owner for not ringing up purchases on the cash register. In Syracuse, he kicked a senior citizen for not returning library books. In Utica, he tripped a man who looked suspicious and who was running. In Schenectady, he broke a 25-pound bag of manure on the steps of a house where people were smoking marijuana. In Albany, he jumped on a prostitute and ripped her blouse. In Massena, he stole the shoes of three Pakistanis who had entered the U.S. illegally from Canada. Small gestures perhaps, but all of them had helped create a remarkable legend.

As The Bat, dressed in ordinary clothes, sat in the limousine that was whisking him to one of the many hideouts he had established for himself around the state (the one for the Buffalo area was located on Mang Avenue in the Village of Kenmore), he pondered his plan of action against the blood-sucking monkeys. This was the biggest challenge he had set for himself so far -- and the most dangerous. Yes, he could very well be killed. But if he succeeded, he would be a hero to all of Western New York. After that, he might even consider running for...but never mind. No sense getting ahead of oneself.

The limo passed through a number of checkpoints. At each one a trooper shone his light on the driver and said gruffly, "There's a curfew, buddy! Ya wanna get yourself arrested?" And the driver would show an I.D. card. "Oh, very sorry! Go right ahead! Drive carefully!...*Hey, Frank, let this one through!*"

In the wee hours of the morning, The Bat left his hideout and walked silently from shadow to shadow toward Delaware Park -- the site of the Buffalo Zoo. The Bat had reasoned that the monkeys would instinctively try to join up with their own kind, perhaps for the purpose of finding mates or concealing themselves among the normal monkeys. He'd be there waiting, armed only with his trusty black baseball bat. He waited for them all night.

Unfortunately, The Bat's theory was completely wrong. The monkeys were nowhere near Delaware Park. As dawn ap-

*Anthony "Fat Tony" Marelllo, 39 Barton St., Elmira, NY 14902

proached, he gave up and headed back to his hideout on Mang Avenue. Going in by the back door, he flipped on his CB radio to catch any possible news on the police band. He was just about to take off his mask when he heard a frightened voice say, "*They're in the cemetery! Riverside Park Cemetery! I'm all alone! Send help! (crackle)...*" He shouted for his chauffeur: "WALDO! GET THE CAR! RIVERSIDE PARK! ON THE DOUBLE!"

Before we get to the exciting climax of our story (in which The Bat's identity will be revealed, by the way, so don't miss it!), I just want to take a moment to say how grateful I am to be living in a country where the freedoms of speech and press are protected by law (with certain exceptions too numerous to list here) and where any man, woman, or child with four bucks (price tentative pending printer's bill) can come up to me on the street and buy this book. You Americans enjoy the same rights. Unfortunately, there are certain people in both our countries who would take these rights away from us on the pretext that books like this are immoral or indecent. I wish to state plainly that such people should be exterminated by having their heads ripped off and their bodies burned in sulfuric acid. I am also proud to say that I endorse all forms of pornography and the activities depicted in them, including everything in my private collection. Single women interested in discussing this subject further should feel free to call me (leave message on answering machine, if necessary).

The sound that came from the Riverside Park Cemetery was like nothing ever heard before in the State of New York, with the possible exception of the Legislature in Albany. Dozens of monkeys were howling, hooting, grunting, and hissing their defiance at the handful of police who were trying to cover the River Road side of the park. Behind the monkeys, along residential streets and all through the park, stretched a trail of bloody carnage -- early-morning joggers who ate healthy foods, did not smoke or drink, went to bed at a reasonable hour, supervised their children's television viewing, opposed urban development, and loved all animal life. And as far as I'm concerned, they got what they deserved!

A crowd of onlookers watched from the road as police fired shots at the agile monkeys to keep them at bay. If they got out of the park, who knew where they'd strike next?

Perhaps the South Side of Chicago, where they would go totally unnoticed.

Suddenly, a limousine roared past a roadblock and screeched to a stop. Out jumped a figure in a striking black costume. One police officer exclaimed to his comrades, "Look! It's...why, it's The Bat!" The crowd's excited voices echoed his words. "*The Bat!...It's The Bat!...The Bat?...What Bat?*"

The Bat brandished his black baseball bat and headed straight toward the band of maniacal blood-sucking monkeys.

"Don't do it, Bat! You'll get killed!" shouted an officer.

Heedless of the warning, The Bat strode right into the jaws of death. Monkeys leapt at him from all directions, and after two swipes of his bat, he was down.

Twenty-four hours later (okay, to be precise, it was twenty-five) the noise from the cemetery had ceased. General O'Brien looked through his binoculars. "They look dead.... Nothing's moving....What do you make of that?"

"We'd better move in and have a look," said General James.

The police and troops entered the cemetery, a nervous finger on every trigger. But not one monkey attacked them. The monkeys were dead. It was only then that the medics were able to retrieve the blood-drained body of The Bat. As reporters gathered around, the medics removed his mask, and a collective gasp of astonishment came from them all:

"LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR STAN LUNDINE!"

Yes, Lieutenant-Governor Stan Lundine, alias The Bat, had given his life, but not in vain. For he had a rare blood factor unknown even to himself, which, although harmless to humans, was fatal to the mutant monkeys. For once in the history of New York State, it was an advantage to have a Lieutenant-Governor whose blood would be poisonous to mutant monkeys. We may never know such a hero again.

Before I left Buffalo, I had a conversation with Dwayne Flarkman, Buffalo's beloved zookeeper-novelist, who explained his theory of how the mutant monkeys came to exist: "I figure it all started with the Love Canal toxic waste. There must have been a couple of pet monkeys in the area who got loose and hid in the Love Canal, and they ate some of the toxic waste and got all mutated, like. Then whenever they had ba-

bies, the babies would be even more mutated, and so on. So when there was a whole bunch of monkeys and they ran out of food, they probably hijacked a raft or boat and floated down the Niagara River and landed at Tonawanda Island. And they could hide there and cross the bridge to North Tonawanda whenever they wanted and maybe hide by the shore of the creek and start eating people. Then I figure they headed roughly south to go through all them industrial areas in Tonawanda so they could get more toxic waste and chemicals and stuff, because they were like addicted to it, get it?"

I cleared my throat. "Ahem. That's a very interesting theory, Dwayne."

"I think you should mention it in your story."

"I certainly will."

He opened a deep drawer and took out a thick manila folder. "I also write novels, you know."

"Oh? How nice."

"Maybe you could help me get published, seeing as how you write books up there in Canada. You must know a lot of publishers."

"Not many, to tell the truth."

"Or better yet, why don't you publish this one yourself? We could both make a million. I'm sure the zoo's gift shop would sell it."

"Well, it's really a lot more complicated than you realize."

"At least do something with it, come on. How about just one page? Just stick one page of it in your next book, okay? It would give me a bit of exposure. You don't even have to pay me for it."

"All right. I'll close my eyes and pick one page at random and stick it in the book somewhere, how's that?"

"Thanks! You're a pal!"

"Don't mention it."

"Don't change nothing, though. Not one word. It's perfect the way it is."

"I won't even change a comma," I promised.

Here, then, is the page I picked at random from Dwayne's novel, which, by the way, is called *Time Warriors of Gorx*:

P.397

When Valeria had finished reviewing her notes to this point the key formula was assured. Satisfied she relaxed and she felt a numbing feeling of fatigue and sleepiness engulfing her and forcing a much needed rest over her entire physical body. And she hurried to bed. However, she was still unable to sleep. Theories-theories -theories raced on in her head-developments and methods. This constituted only half of the problem. The other half is concerned with how these organic changes or modifications have occurred in nature, resulting in the innumerable species forms which now inhabit the face of the globe. 1st. Larmarch's theories or laws as described in his book, Philosophie Zoologique, which he described his idea of racial development. (Theory of need, theory of use and disuse); Theory of inheritance Darwin theory of natural selection

Valeria had long ago discarded the genus order classification of relationship and descent as groups placements of individuals. She figured a German named August Weismann's theory of germ plasm against his so called, somatoplasm, body cell theory which does differ from Lamarch's idea, "that acquired characteristics can be inherited". She figured that her experiments, however, confirmed the probability that changes in the number of chromosomes, or effects produced in their genes from various cosmic ray, may be the determining factors for skin putation.

Valeria had reasoned that the putation of skin-colorings was an acquired characteristic of environmental conditions of nature's laws of natural selection which supplemented the gene pigments of the chromosomes egg-cells which in turn may cause a changed condition from any natural disturbances of nature's elements, cosmic rays, electronic storms, Atomic, hydrogenic explosions and volcanic disturbances and etc.

At last she sighed, it doesn't really matter to me which scientific theories becomes applicable. The gene theory is my key-my solution- This my own experiments has proven. I must now rest and go to sleep. sleep, she thought-; what a glorious tonic for fatiguing brain-cells running wild of a brain-storm thinking capacity of an indefinite mind in its cramped conditions and spurring the human brain to action in this girl's overtired mental and physical bodies as being

I can think of no better way to end this story.
I mean that literally.

MY DATE WITH ALAN EDMONDS

To most people he is just a TV celebrity -- the host, producer, and writer of the staggeringly popular show *Live It Up*, seen on the CTV network. But to me he is the Caesar, the Alexander, the Einstein, and the Millard Fillmore of popular culture all rolled into one -- a man of flesh, blood, and saliva, a man whose every cell burns with intense desire for experience (I do not believe I am exaggerating on this point!), a man who made my life worth living again, a man I can call Alan, Al, or Butch, depending on the circumstances. That man is Alan Edmonds.

For years he passed me on the street near Yonge and Charles, around the corner from CTV, as I peddled my books. He seemed perfectly oblivious to my presence, even when I wore such provocative signs as "Abnormal Bedtime Stories," "Rotten Canadian Literature," or "Moral Degenerate -- Buy my book." Obviously, he was merely pretending not to notice me. Who could believe that a professional television producer could be so out of touch with reality as to fail to see me for ten years? Why, such a person would have to be an utter blockhead! No, he was aware of me, and with the sly looks I gave him -- imperceptible to any third party except possibly a psychoanalyst or pimp -- I made it clear that I was well aware of him and that I was equally aware of his pretending not to be aware of me. His apparent inattention may have been intended to communicate: "*Be discreet! People are watching!*" -- or words to that effect. In this way, a relationship arose between us, which, if I may say so without seeming to be self-serving, deepened into quasi-intimacy as he continued to walk past me several times a week without so much as a smile, nod, wave, or word of greeting. This is the kind of rare personal interaction that a writer hopes to experience once in his lifetime if he is lucky.

What was it that first attracted me to Alan Edmonds, you may be wondering? This is not an easy question to answer,

for here we are touching upon all those feelings and ideas that have their roots in the id -- the level of the mind that operates according to its own primitive and irrational laws, quite apart from the civilizing influence of the modern, high-tech world with its computers, advanced education, post-industrial fashion boutiques, churches, mental hospitals, and correctional institutions. One cannot analyze this attraction (two can, but not one alone); one can only reveal a gut feeling. For me, it was partly that odd way that he walked, that clunky, rumpety-dump gait suggesting brute power and a fierce defiance of the world. And in his eyes was that hard, flinty, haunted look of a wounded animal desperate for love yet perhaps afraid of it. I'm tempted to say it was a look suggesting *abnormality*, but this is a word that has been beaten into meaninglessness by overuse. I prefer to think of this quality as a *capacity for the unconventional*, the dark side of human personality, a shadow within which lurk demons and monsters. Only a writer like myself, disposed professionally to studying deeper meanings beneath the facade of the everyday, could discern so much in the deceptively bland and boring face that Alan presents to the world.

It seemed entirely fitting -- one might say *destined* -- that I should get to know Al on closer terms. But Toronto is a strange and unamiable city in this regard. The direct gesture goes against the grain of our reserve and is treated automatically with suspicion, or even alarm. So it was that on that day when I stepped forward from my habitual station beside Gold's Gym, planted myself in Al's path, and said, "Mr. Edmonds, I am your deepest admirer and want to know you better," this great, bearded bear of a man flinched in surprise and then covered himself with a hasty, mumbled acknowledgment of thanks before hurrying away. I'm sure that my penetrating eye contact was not wasted, however, for I thought I saw a look in his toad-colored eyes that could only mean "*Not now! Not here!*"

I waited for him in the same spot the next day, but he did not appear. Was he trying to avoid me? Or was this his way of signaling to me that I must arrange to cross his path elsewhere?

I then began to hang about near the CTV building on Charles St., either across the street, in the parking lot, or by the post office next door. Whenever I caught sight of him I would wave, but he would pretend not to see me. Perhaps it was because he did not want to be seen talking to me

by his colleagues. Or perhaps it was simply not his way to rush into things. Perhaps the moon had to be in the right phase, or perhaps he had to be wearing his lucky underwear. Television personalities are often very complex, even if they appear to be simple. Oh, but it was painful for me to be led on in this way, you can be sure!

On a cold evening in December I could wait no longer. I saw him leave the CTV building and caught up with him from behind. "Alan Edmonds!" I greeted him. "You are my idol. I have so much to learn from you. We simply must get to know each other."

He seemed startled and laughed nervously. "Heh, heh... I, uh, don't think I know you."

"Yes, you do," I said firmly. "But this is not the place to talk. Let's go have a drink."

"I'm sorry, I simply can't. Now, if you'll excuse me," he said abruptly, as he changed direction suddenly and walked toward the parking lot. *Very well*, I thought. *Play that game with me. You can't get away from Fate so easily!*

The next day I waited for him in the parking lot. When he appeared, I popped up suddenly between two cars. "Mr. Edmonds! Alan! Can I call you Alan?"

"I'm in a hurry. Don't bother me."

"Alan. Very good. Look, I've got your book." I held up a copy of his book, *Living It Up And Down*, which I'd purchased the previous evening at Coles. "I was up all night reading it! A masterpiece! Would you autograph it for me?"

He sighed impatiently and reached for his pen. "Oh, very well, if it'll make you happy." He scribbled his name in a few illegible strokes. "There."

"Wait! Put something personal! Please, I beg you!"

He snorted. "Oh, all right. What do you want me to write?"

"Please write, 'To Crad Kilodney -- the start of a beautiful friendship.'"

His eyes narrowed with hostility. He scribbled hastily and handed the book back to me. "Good night," he said.

"It's a great book, Alan. The clerk in the store said it was a boring piece of garbage, but I defended your honor quite loudly, I assure you. In fact, I made such a scene in the store I almost got thrown out."

"It's hardly that important. Now, good night."

"I mean, after all, the book was short-listed for the Leacock Award. That's really something."

"Yes." He was trying to get into his car. "Excuse me, I'm late."

"But it didn't win, did it?"

"I'm afraid not. Now, if you'll--"

"This is a great injustice! I ought to write to the Leacock Committee and tell them off! Why, I read that book and couldn't stop laughing for one second, it was so funny! Especially that bit about how wire coat hangers keep getting tangled! Hysterical!"

"Thank you. Now, I'm afraid I must--"

"Or that suggestion that rapists should be castrated! Wow, what a sense of humor!"

"Uh, I was actually being serious about that."

"You were? Oh. Well, never mind."

He managed to get into his car. "Well, good night again -- for the last time."

"Hey, give me a lift home?"

"No!" He locked the door, revved his engine, and roared away at high speed.

I looked at the inscription in his book: "*Merry Christmas. A. Edmonds.*" Succinct, but undeniably heartfelt.

The next day I left a copy of one of my own books for him at the CTV reception desk. I inscribed it: "*To Al, my colleague, idol, and pal.*" I expected at least a note of thanks but got none.

I followed this up with telephone messages left for him at the network: "*Meet C.K. outside the gym at 6:00.*" "*Call C.K. at midnight tonight.*" "*C.K. must see you urgently at Burger King, lower level, between 12 and 1.*" "*C.K. will be waiting for you by the patio of Komrads, 8 p.m.*" Result: nothing.

Far from discouraged, I dogged his path at every opportunity and called out to him in a loud voice, "Al! Wait up!" He would always turn a corner and manage to disappear. Obviously, there was something wrong with my approach. Perhaps I was being too forward. New tactics would be needed. I had to find a way to break through the barrier so that he would understand that we were destined to become great friends, not just distant, silent admirers.

About this time I had the good luck to bump into the president of the network while selling my books beside Gold's Gym. He would often give me a smile or say hello to me on the street (unlike certain media snobs not worth naming here, including some pretty big people whom I intend to deal with

in due course unless they mend their ways). On this occasion he stopped briefly to ask how I was doing and would I be out all winter, that sort of thing. He remarked that he was off to the Bahamas the following evening for a short but well-deserved break.

Armed with this information, I waited for Alan the next evening south of Charles, instead of in my usual spot, figuring that he was avoiding me by going in the other direction. Sure enough, I intercepted him. He pretended to look across the street to get by me quickly, but I called out to him, "Hey, Al! It's me!" He quickened his stride and kept going. I hastily packed up my satchel and ran after him. I caught him at a red light.

"Will you stop following me!" he snarled.

"Al, we have to talk. It's about your job."

"What are you talking about?"

"Step over here into the shadow."

"I will do no such thing!" The light changed, and he fairly charged across the street like an infantryman.

I pursued him. "I was talking to Murray," I said breathlessly. "He intimated that he isn't happy with your recent work. He said he'd be making some tough decisions when he came back from the Bahamas."

The last few words snagged him back like a cable snagging a landing plane on the deck of an aircraft carrier.

"How did you know he was going to the Bahamas?"

"He told me yesterday." I looked at my watch. "Yep, he's on his way. Air Canada."

Alan eyed me narrowly, but more with curiosity than hostility. "You know Murray Chercover personally?"

"Of course, I do. We're *like that*." I held up two fingers pressed together. "He and his family have been reading my books for years." I then dropped a few bits of information about members of the family to prove my acquaintance with the president of the network.

An icy sleet began to fall. Alan's visible breaths seemed to come faster. "I'm sure that Mr. Chercover has no plans to make any changes with my show....What did he say to you exactly? And when?"

"Yesterday afternoon. We had a long discussion about a lot of things. A very intellectual man, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, the subject of TV came up, and he said that people tended to get stale after doing the same thing for too

long, and it showed in the programs. *Live It Up*, for instance, was getting a little dull and predictable--"

"What?"

"And the production and writing were so simple-minded any kid fresh out of Ryerson could do the same thing -- and for a lot less money."

"I don't believe it! Murray, uh, Mr. Chercover has never said anything like that to me!"

"Well, there may be reasons for that, I don't know. Sometimes the swift blow is kinder than putting someone in a prolonged state of fear. And he said something to the effect of cutting the weak out of the herd as a message to everyone else."

"But did he say me personally?" The sleet was intensifying, driving into our faces like little needles. Alan's glasses were wet, and his breaths were short and frantic.

"Well, yes and no. I told him your book was great and that you could probably live off your royalties, and he said he hoped so for your sake--"

"What?"

"Because you had a bird's nest for a brain."

"My God!"

"Maybe that was some sort of obscure Jewish literary reference. Or maybe he was just in a bad mood, although you'd think a person would be in a good mood the day before a vacation."

"I...I just don't believe it!" Alan stammered. "This is a joke! Admit it! You're concocting this to torment me!"

"What motive would I have for such a joke? Tell me that."

"I don't know! Perhaps you're insane!" he replied angrily.

"Would Murray Chercover talk to an insane person on the street?"

"Uh, no, but...that is...." He took off his glasses and wiped them.

"I'm sorry if I've upset you, Al. Perhaps I shouldn't have said anything."

"No, I appreciate...I mean...whatever you might know.... That is, I'd certainly want to know...um, if I were displeasing Mr. Chercover....I'd certainly want to correct any, uh..."

"Well, don't despair. I want to help you if I can. As you may understand, I'm in a position to, mmm, shall we say, *make certain recommendations*. And, of course, Murray may

feel differently after he's had his vacation. Anyway, nobody gets axed this close to Christmas." A short distance away, a shabbily-dressed beggar of Alan's age sat on the wet pavement playing a pitiful rendition of "Silent Night" on his harmonica as passers-by dropped small change in the shoe box in front of him. Alan pulled up his coat collar. "We should really discuss your situation over dinner," I said.

"Not tonight! Really, I can't tonight! I've a party to go to...." Then a thought seemed to hit him, and he straightened himself with an air of assertion. "Yes, as a matter of fact, I expect Mrs. Chercover to be there. I'll just ask her if they know you. Yes, I'll just check you out, Mr. whatever-your-name-is."

"Kilodney. But please call me Crad."

"I'll just see if you're telling the truth about knowing them."

"Okay, that's fine. I'll meet you by the gym tomorrow. You'll take me to dinner."

"We'll see!" And he walked away, glancing contemptuously at the harmonica-playing beggar.

As I expected, Alan's sense of security did not last through the night, for the following day, around 5:30, he walked toward my spot beside the gym with the look of a man who has not slept at all. I smiled at him benevolently.

"She said they do know you," he said sullenly. "The son's a big fan of yours, in fact." I began to pack up my case. "That doesn't prove that my job is in danger, however," he went on.

"No, of course not," I said, still smiling. "If you want to take the chance that it isn't, that's fine with me. I have no vested interest either way." This seemed to confuse him. I zipped my case shut. "Where are you taking me for dinner?"

"You're hardly dressed for a proper restaurant."

I unbuttoned my overcoat to reveal a suit and tie.

"Let's go someplace really swank."

"I'm not rich, you know."

"Oh, phooey. A man of your stature can't afford to look cheap. Besides, if you play your cards right, you may even get a raise out of all this."

"I'm not cheap. Don't get the wrong idea." He reached into his pocket. "Let me have one of those books."

"I left you one at work. Didn't you get it?"

"What? Oh, uh, yeah, right. Well, sell me a different

one. Authors have to make a living."

"Okay." I opened my case again. "You should really get the expensive one. It's the best." I produced a copy.

"How much is it?"

"Twelve dollars."

He hesitated, then opened his wallet and gave me the money. "Put it in a bag or something, will you?"

"Sure thing." I gave it to him in a brown envelope.

"Of course, it's not as funny as yours. It wasn't even considered for the Leacock Award."

"I'm sure it's very good all the same."

We went to an expensive restaurant near Bay and Charles. The maitre d' eyed me coldly because of my shabby coat, but when I took it off he was reassured by the suit and tie.

"Give us a table in a dark corner," I said.

"As you wish, monsieur."

We were seated, and the menus were given to us. A waiter appeared without delay. "Would you gentlemen care for a cocktail?"

"Champagne," I said at once. "Your best."

"Yes, sir!" said the waiter, departing.

Alan looked unhappy for a moment. He coughed nervously, scanning the menu.

"Just think, Al, it's our first date."

"*This is not a date!*" he hissed, his hand by his mouth as he looked quickly left and right. "This is business. I'm going to claim it as a legitimate business expense, just so no one...just so there's no misunderstanding."

"Of course....Hmmm, this looks good -- Chateaubriand for two. Let's have that."

"I'm not very hungry."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. Perhaps the champagne will perk up your appetite."

The champagne arrived, and the waiter opened it skillfully and poured it for us as I gazed into Alan's eyes. He glared at me.

"Ready to order, gentlemen?"

"Chateaubriand for two, medium-rare," I said cheerfully.

When the waiter left, Alan snapped at me, "*Will you stop looking at me like that, for God's sake!*"

"Candlelight becomes you," I said softly.

He immediately blew the candle out, growling under his breath. A minute later, a bus boy stopped to relight it.

"Thank you," I said.

Alan took a large swallow of champagne. "So...uh...what specifically were we going to discuss?"

"Can I call you Butch?" I asked, ignoring his question.

He spilled some champagne on his shirt. "*Oh, shit....* Butch? Why Butch?"

"You look like a Butch. Butch Edmonds. Has a nice ring to it."

"Well, I, uh....*Oh*, all right, if you wish," he grumbled.

"Can I ask you a personal question, Butch?"

"What?" He wiped his shirt with his napkin.

"What marks did you get in phys. ed.?"

He shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "I don't remember." He wiped some sweat off his brow.

"I'll bet you got A's."

"No, I was just average."

"You're being modest. I can tell you have a very *manly* body. I'll bet you were a good wrestler. I wasn't much good at wrestling myself, but I loved the *contact*, if you know what I mean."

"*Will you stop it!*" he hissed again. "And stop looking at me like that. What will people think?"

"I don't know. I don't care what people think anyway."

"Evidently not." He looked at me sternly. "Now I'm going to ask *you* a question."

"Of course, Butch."

He leaned forward. "Are you...*gay*?"

I laughed loudly. "Oh, that's so cute! Gay!"

"*Shh! Not so loud!*"

"Well, you asked!" He was hiding his head in his hands. "I mean, really, what does that word mean these days? Don't all people have both masculine and feminine components in their personalities? Freud said--"

"*Forget it! Keep your voice down!*" He took another gulp of champagne, then pushed back his chair. "Excuse me, I'm just going to the men's room to, uh, to wash the spot on my shirt before it stains."

"I'll go with you."

"No!" He got up and left. He was gone a very long time.

When he returned, I was studying a piece of paper. "What's that?" he asked.

"These are some ideas for your show."

"We have people who research ideas."

"I've already discussed these with Murray, and he liked

them."

"You did? He did?" At this point the waiter arrived and had to ask Alan twice to move his hand so he could set down his plate.

"Shall I divide your portions, gentlemen?"

"Yes, please," I chirped. "Say, don't you think my friend looks like Peter Ustinov? He wrote in his book that he gets mistaken for Peter Ustinov."

The waiter looked at Alan. "I believe there is a resemblance."

"Do you watch TV? This man is a TV celebrity! Can you guess who he is?" Alan forced a weak smile.

"I'm sorry, sir. I do not recognize the gentleman. I don't watch TV very much."

"This is Alan Edmonds of CTV! You know, *Live It Up!*"

"Please, there's no need--" Alan mumbled.

"He really is!" I said to the people at the nearest table.

"I'm very sorry, sir," said the waiter.

"He's also an author! He writes the funniest books!"

"Would you mind," said Alan testily.

"We have many authors who come here. We are always honored and delighted. Can I get you gentlemen anything else?"

"No, thank you," said Alan.

We began to eat. Then I picked up my sheet of ideas.

"Now, here's one. A close-up of a liver transplant." Alan stopped chewing, his knife and fork clinking on the rim of his plate. "What's the matter? Don't you like this idea? Organ transplants are very topical."

He covered his mouth with his napkin momentarily, then swallowed with some effort. "Don't you think that's a little, well, explicit for our audience?"

"Murray didn't think so....Well, perhaps you want to keep things bland."

"I didn't say that," he replied quickly. He poked his vegetables a bit. "I suppose we can do an item on liver transplants. Not a whole operation, of course. They take hours. We've only got a half-hour show."

"Of course, I understand. Good....Now, here's another idea, also medical-related. Anatomical freaks. Do you know that one woman in every two thousand has a vestigial third nipple? And nearly one person in every five thousand has a large, disfiguring tumor?"

"You must be insane! Do you think I would sensational-

ize the misfortunes--"

"No, no, no! There you go jumping to conclusions! No, it would be something of a compassionate nature. Something to break down the barriers of prejudice."

"Oh....I see....Well...."

"You would spend twenty-four hours, let's say, with a person suffering from a grotesque abnormality and tell the viewers how your attitudes changed." Alan gaped at me, open-mouthed. "Murray thought it was an excellent idea. He knows a lady who has elephantiasis, a very horrible case. He'd like to help her....What's the matter, Butch? Don't you like your meat?"

"What? Oh...no, it's fine....So I'm to do this feature with this...this lady who has this disease?"

"Murray and I think it's a very good idea, and completely humanitarian."

Alan grumbled ambiguously. "What other ideas have you got?"

"Here's one I'm sure you'll like. It's about animals. The idea is to look at the world from the point of view of an animal."

"I don't get it."

"Well, let's say we pick a squirrel. So the whole feature is from the squirrel's point of view. The camera would be at ground level, or it would be up in a tree, or going along the top of a fence, or whatever. And you'd have to act like a squirrel and see if the other squirrels accepted you as one of them."

"That's positively ridiculous!"

"No, it isn't. Just go over to the Metro Zoo and you'll see researchers sitting with the orangutans right in their pens. Are they being ridiculous?"

"That's different. That has a scientific purpose."

"So would our feature. Hey, it's never been done before in a serious way for a general audience."

"I did something similar with dogs...sort of similar, anyway."

"Oh, *that*. Ugh. No, not at all what Murray wants."

Alan loosened his tie and drank some more champagne. "I suppose...I suppose I can put together...something like what you suggest."

"Now, here's an idea that's more of a fun idea. A begging contest between panhandlers. It would include all the seediest winos and glue-sniffers on the street. Can you

imagine it! It would be a blast!"

He put his fork down with an emphatic clink and wiped his lips. "That's the most tasteless thing I've ever heard! It's not remotely amusing."

"You don't think so?"

"No!"

"So you're accusing me of bad taste?"

He paused a moment, looking at his plate absently, then looked me in the eye. "Frankly, yes. In this instance."

I assumed a serious air, put down my fork, took a sip of champagne, and then looked at him with my head tilted up slightly to give the effect of looking down at him. "Well, Butch, I find an accusation of bad taste rather hollow coming from someone who tells anti-Semitic jokes."

"What the devil do you mean?" he demanded.

"Well, I didn't want to tell you this, Butch...." I leaned forward confidentially. "You once told an anti-Semitic joke at a party, and it got back to Murray."

Alan's brow was creased in thought. "What joke? When was this?"

"Don't try to deny it. You know what I'm referring to."

His napkin fell on the floor without his noticing. His face screwed up in an expression of discomfort. He let out a long, slow breath and folded his arms in front of him. "I wasn't the one who told that joke at that party. It was someone else."

"Ah, but you laughed at it! You found it funny!"

"I....Now, look here. Everyone laughed, not just me. And it was a very mild joke, nothing bad at all." I sat back, looking at him as a doctor might look at a terminal patient whose latest tests have come back. "Look, everyone tells jokes like that!" he protested. "It isn't malicious! It doesn't mean anything!"

"Not to you maybe. But how do you think Murray felt when he learned that you had laughed along with the others?"

"Murray Chercover isn't even religious!"

"Ah, but these things cut more deeply than you can possibly know! When you consider the Holocaust and all the centuries of persecution....Do you think any Jew forgets that, even if he's unobservant? And for you, a Gentile, to laugh at a people who have suffered--"

"I meant no such thing!"

I put my hands together as if to pray for him, my head down. "That's what I said to Murray -- that you didn't mean

it." I looked up at him again. "But, boy, was he pissed off."

"Believe me, never in my life have I ever--"

The maitre d' suddenly appeared. "Is everything satisfactory, gentlemen?"

"Yes, fine, thank you," I said. "But I don't think my friend is going to finish his steak. Do you suppose I could take it home in a bag?"

"Yes, of course, you may." He turned to Alan. "Did you not like your steak, sir?"

I interjected, "He's just upset because he may lose his job."

"That's not true!"

"I'm very sorry, sir."

"But I'm going to try to save it for him," I went on. "Television is a cruel business, you know. You're a hit one day and a nobody the next."

"He's joking!" Alan said, forcing a smile.

"As you say, sir. Would you like dessert and coffee and perhaps a liqueur?"

"Nothing for me," said Alan.

"I'll have a Grand Marnier," I said.

"Very good, sir." He signaled the waiter, who came at once. "A Grand Marnier for this gentleman."

"And put my friend's steak in a doggy bag for me," I added.

"Yes, sir," said the waiter, taking our plates away.

Alan took off his glasses and covered his eyes with his right hand. I said nothing. He finally put his hand down. His face was flushed. "I had no idea..." he began. "Surely ...things can't be as bad for me as you claim."

"Oh, now, now," I said soothingly. "I told you before, I'm in a position to exert some influence for your benefit."

"I'm sorry I laughed at that joke. Really and truly sorry."

"I know, I know. We all make mistakes. I think the show is the main problem. We feel it needs changes. A producer must be open to constructive suggestions."

"Yes, yes, I'm *very* open to constructive suggestions! Always have been!"

"So you like those ideas I gave you?"

"Yes, yes! Very good ideas! Very, um, *creative*!"

"And we have some other ideas for the show."

"Good, good. I'm delighted."

The waiter appeared with my liqueur and doggy bag.

"Please bring us the check," said Alan.

"Right away, sir," said the waiter.

"I'm very glad we had this discussion," said Alan, reaching into his pocket and taking out his wallet. He selected a credit card. "Believe me, I see everything in a new light. Murray Chercover will find me a changed man when he gets back."

"I'm so glad, Butch."

"Heh, heh, yes, indeed. Change is healthy. That's what I always say."

"Murray and I think *Live It Up* should be completely revamped."

"Eh? How do you mean?"

"Well, it's not in tune with the Eighties any more. The Nineties are almost upon us. The show needs a radical change of image. For one thing, Murray and I are convinced that the future lies in late-night programming. Where's *Live It Up* slotted now? Seven-thirty. That's Deadsville."

He frowned slightly. "What's wrong with....Well, what time was he thinking of?"

"Three a.m."

"*Three a.m.?*" He dropped his wallet. "*Three a.m.? Are you serious?*"

"It's the future, Butch. It's all in the demographics."

The waiter arrived with the check on a little silver tray and left. Alan squinted at it in the candlelight. "*My God*," he mumbled. He put his credit card on the tray and motioned to the waiter to take it. The waiter came at once and took the tray to the cashier.

Alan took a final sip of champagne. "Three a.m., you say?...Well...I suppose I can accommodate that."

"And we think it needs a new name," I said, rubbing my chin thoughtfully, "although we haven't quite made up our minds. I sort of like *Butch's Dungeon*. Murray thought of *Night-Shriek*. I don't know. Which one grabs you?"

"Well, I, uh...I'd have to give it some thought, heh, heh. That sounds like quite a...radical departure, heh, heh."

The waiter reappeared with the charge slip and Alan's card and then stood a discreet distance away. "Leave him a big tip," I told Alan. "You want to be able to bring me here again."

"Eh?...Oh....Yes...." He added the tip to the charge slip and signed it. The waiter came at once, tore out Alan's

copy for him, thanked us, and left.

I nursed the last few drops of my liqueur. He started to get up, then sat down again. "Sorry. Don't let me rush you....What was that name again? *Butch's Dungeon?*"

"Yes, something like that. You can get away with some pretty raw stuff in a late-night time slot."

"Heh, heh...I'm sort of...well...I've always been a rather conservative individual."

"We think you need a completely new look." I downed the last of the liqueur and stood up. He followed my cue.

"New look?"

"Yes, we're going to have to take you to Streetwear and buy you some new threads. You know, that post-industrial urban-decay look -- patched jeans, black leather, lots of metal, that sort of thing."

"That's not really my style. Not at all," he said nervously.

We reached the coat check and got our coats. I retrieved my book satchel.

"We think you'd look stunningly chic," I went on. "It's a *tough, gutsy, cynical* look. It's the future."

"I don't really--"

"And the beard and the hair have to go. A shaved head is the thing, and studs and rings in the nose and ears. And we were thinking of latex rubber. You know, fetish stuff."

He stared at me in shock. He seemed to be suppressing tears. I guided him by the arm to the front door. "You're really expecting an awful lot," he said weakly. "I hope this isn't already decided....I mean, changes like these....One must have some time to adjust....That is, I don't quite know...."

The maitre d' wished us good night as we left. We stood on the doorstep. Snow was coming down thickly.

"I must confide something to you, Butch. The network is in big trouble. *Financial trouble*. It needs a hit strong enough to knock the country on its ass. We think your show is the one to gamble with, but the question is, can you handle it? Are you professional enough?"

"What? Can I....Yes, I....Well, given time, that is...." He adjusted his coat. "Why do you keep saying 'we'? You're not an employee of the network. You don't work for Murray."

I smiled. "Butch...I'm going to be your co-producer!"

A look of confusion covered his face and then turned to fury. "You...you...."

"It's great, isn't it, Butch! We'll not only socialize together off the job, we'll be working together as well! It'll be almost like a marriage!"

"NEVER!" he exploded. "JOB OR NO JOB! I WON'T STAND FOR IT!"

I put my arm through his. "Butch?"

"WHAT?"

"Can we go dancing now?"

He pulled himself away. "YOU BASTARD! YOU LUNATIC!"

And then his fist came at me very fast, and that was the last thing I could remember.

*

Butch, I know you didn't mean it. In fact, I've already forgiven you. When you get to read these words, you'll understand that the only reason you still have your job is that I didn't tell Murray what happened. No, in fact, I gave him the best possible report. *Live It Up* won't be changed after all, although it's likely to be reslotted to 6 a.m. sometime in late '89 or early '90. You'll be told officially. *Night-Shriek* is on the back burner, but I've been promised the job when it gets going.

Butch, you never visited me in the hospital. You never visited me at home. Never even wrote me a get-well card. Well, that's okay. You're a difficult man to understand -- a bit anti-social, if I may say so. But as fellow artists, we have much in common. I'll never forget your face in the candlelight, or the moment you spilled your champagne, or the way you looked just before you slugged me. You know what they say, Butch: you always hurt the one you love. But let's give it another go, shall we? Tell you what, give me a call. I'll take you to dinner at McDonald's. Then we'll go dancing. And then I want to discuss a book I want to collaborate with you on. It's about insanity as an art-form. It'll involve the worst mental patients we can find and all their zany ideas, sort of deconstructed and turned into funny stories. It's too complicated to explain here. Anyway, a sure-fire Governor-General's Award book, and we're not just talking short list either. Call me.

HAPPY-GO-LUCKY TIME

And it came to pass in those savage days, before the Megalon Shopping Centre, with more than 300 stores to make human consciousness complete and ample parking on four levels, that there was a certain Levite named Sluggo, who rode a Harley-Davidson and who could drink 25 beers in one night and boogie till dawn. He was tough but a nice guy when you got to know him. He told funny jokes, his underwear was almost clean, and he did not read child pornography. And while he was hanging out near Mount Ephraim (this was before it became so touristy), he spotted this great-looking chick strutting her stuff on the main street of that hick town. She wore tight jeans and a tight sweater and had a good pair of knockers. So he pulled up ahead of her and revved his chopper, and she was cool enough not to act too impressed right away because she wanted this dude to exert himself a bit for her sake. But already a heart-shaped thought balloon was floating above her head, and inside it was the word "Freedom." And a similar thought balloon floated above Sluggo's head, and it said "Hot Pussy."

The chick walked past him slowly, and she wiggled her ass like a hot little fox, and Sluggo said, "Hey, baby, I want to talk to you."

"Oh, yeah?" she replied, stopping. "Okay."

And Sluggo, who was straightforward if not articulate, sang:

*"Oh, won't you come with me-hee-hee
And take my ha-ha-ha-ha-haand,
Oh, won't you come with me-hee-hee
And walk this la-ha-ha-ha-haand."*

She was a sucker for that sort of thing and got on his bike without another word.

Her name was Nadine Shapiro, and she lived in a suburban development called Bethlehem-judah, which was okay except that the local boys were such nerds. Her parents were after

her to get married and settle down, whereas she wanted to live a bit wild. So she figured with Sluggo she could eat her cake and have it, too. She could marry him and get her parents off her back, and she could also go places and have fun. Sluggo didn't mind marrying her for the sake of form, although as far as he was concerned, she was just another concubine.

They biked around a lot and it was okay at first, but then Nadine got greedy and began screwing a lot of guys behind his back. She was a slut, although she preferred to think of herself as liberated. She especially liked young virgin boys between the ages of 12 and 14 and really old geezers who would not only pay for it but also buy her dinner. After a while, she got totally bored with Sluggo, who was not the great lover she expected, and returned to her father's house in Bethlehem-judah and was there four whole months, just watching TV, eating junk food, going shopping with her old girlfriends, and letting her parents spoil her while she pretended to be the victim of a bad marriage.

It took Sluggo all that time to go after her because at first he decided she wasn't worth it and a man doesn't like to lose face. But then he started to miss her because she was a good lay after all and he also just liked having her around, though not for any specific reason. So Sluggo showed up at the old homestead, along with a friend named Clifford, whom he referred to as his "assistant" -- like, Sluggo was getting to be upwardly mobile in business, get it? -- and Clifford was on his own chopper, of course, and Sluggo now had a sidecar on his bike loaded with stuff, including some expensive gifts for the in-laws. This was totally awesome to the old man, Mr. Shapiro, who thought Sluggo had a real future because Levites had excellent social status and could get into the best country clubs even if they weren't angels. And Sluggo spoke very nicely and was entirely charming and socially correct, saying how he loved Nadine and wanted to give her the best, and they should smooth things over, and so on.

So for three days it was family bliss and eating and drinking.

And it came to pass that on the fourth day Sluggo announced that it was time for him and Nadine and Clifford to be going, and old man Shapiro said, "Let's have one more good feed, and then you can go." And he ordered in a ton of Chinese food.

Well, they all ate and drank and then looked at home movies and told a lot of stories, and by then the day was shot. "No point leaving now," said Mr. Shapiro. "Might as well stick around overnight." Sluggo started to protest, but the old man insisted, so they stayed overnight.

The next day the same thing happened. The old man obviously didn't want them to leave and managed to delay them until the afternoon was shot. "Gee, it's almost sundown. No point leaving now."

This time Sluggo said, "No, really, we got to be going. But, hey, it's been great. Thanks a lot." So he and Nadine and Clifford collected their stuff and got on their bikes, and Mrs. Shapiro insisted on cramming the sidecar full of leftovers. Soon the three of them were heading off in the direction of Jebus, Nadine holding on to Sluggo with a sense of renewed if not absolute devotion.

They rode along happily and without a care, and when they reached Jebus it was late, and Clifford suggested they stop for the night. But Sluggo didn't want to stay in Jebus because the Jebusites were not his kind of people. They had flat heads, no cable TV, and didn't accept travelers' cheques. He said, "Let's go on to Gibeah. Either Gibeah or Ramah -- one of those places."

"My ass hurts," Nadine interjected.

"Don't you want to ride so high that you can touch the sky and feel like you will never die?" Sluggo asked rhetorically. And as if to emphasize the point, Clifford hummed a classic biker song through clenched teeth, with droplets of spit coming out on the downbeats. His blue eyes took on that hard look of a free spirit expanding over the wilderness, which more than compensated for his extreme imbecility. Nadine looked at him with a scornful smirk. They did not like each other.

They continued riding and by sundown they were in Gibeah, which had a lot of the Benjamin clan -- pretty serious folks and real good in business. Unfortunately, there were no hotels. (This was before the Labour Party came to power and built up the casinos and other tourist stuff.) So they just stopped in the middle of the main street, which was deserted, waiting for someone to come up to them and invite them to stay over. Nadine walked around to stretch her legs as she thrust her breasts out in a lewd pose, with her hands clasped behind her head and her sweater riding up above her navel -- anything to arouse a sign of life in this dead burg.

But the only person to appear was this old man who was coming back from work in the fields near Mount Ephraim. He lodged in Gibeah, but he was not one of the Benjamites. The old dude came up to them and asked, "Where are you going, and where do you come from?"

Sluggo replied, "We were just coming from Bethlehem-judah, and we were on our way to the house of the Lord. I got important business there, they can't do without me for two minutes practically, heh, heh. Anyway, we were hoping to get put up here, but nobody's come out to meet us. And it's not as though we're looking to freeload off anybody. Look at all this food and wine and dope we got. We're glad to share."

The old man said, "Hey, *mi casa es su casa*. Anything you need, just ask. But let's get the hell off this street. This town can get weird after dark." So they went to his house, where he lived with his virgin daughter, who was in her twenties. That she was, in fact, the only virgin left in a town of sexual degenerates may give you an idea of what she looked like -- not exactly a prize, but real good in domestic skills and the sort of simple girl one might refer to as "a good listener."

Sluggo and Clifford stowed their bikes in the shed out back, and the old man even gave them a free fill of gas. Then they went inside and washed up and sat down to a big dinner.

They ate and drank themselves into untra-mellowness. Even the normally taciturn Nadine became rather garrulous with the old man. "Like, I tried this secretarial course because if you become a secretary for a company president you can really luck out, but it turned out I had to know spelling and stuff like that, which I'm not that good at, and I go, 'Hell, if I have to be, like, Miss Merriam-Webster and know all those words by heart, they're going to have to pay me about a hundred thousand dollars, otherwise I just can't be bothered.' So then I took this etsthe...esste...shit, I can't say it...ess-the-ti-shun...there...esthetician course. That just means beautician but it's supposed to pay more because it's an esthetician, not just a beautician." She belched and swayed slightly in her chair as she reached for another beer. "I...am a qualifed...eth-sitician....I even have a diploma." She gave Sluggo a mean look. "I don't *have* to be a concubine. I'm qualified in a respectable profession."

And Sluggo laughed and said, "Ain't she a pisser, Doc?" He had decided, for no particular reason, to address the old

man as 'Doc.' "I think I'll keep her, heh, heh. Hey, Doc, here's a good joke....Knock, knock."

"What?...Oh, who's there?" said the old man.

"Levite."

"Levite who?"

"Levite to Beaver!"

"Ha, ha. Very good."

"Here's another one. Ask me how I like being a Levite."

"How do you like being a Levite?"

"Oh, I can take it or Levite! Ha!"

"A qualified eth-sitician is worth her weight in gold -- *hic!*" said Nadine, spilling her beer.

In the midst of this conviviality, a commotion began outside. The sons of Belial, a bunch of devil-worshippers, had surrounded the house and were banging on the door and the walls and were calling out to the old man: *"Bring out that big guy you got staying with you so that we can know him!"*

Sluggo asked the old man, "What do they mean by that? Do they want to meet me, is that it?"

"No, it means they want to fuck you in the ass."

"Oh, that's just swell. That really makes my day. Why don't you tell those weirdos to go fuck each other."

"Oh, they do fuck each other, but they always act this way when strangers are in town. They're high-spirited boys, not bad at all in the daytime. It's just once in a while they get into a funny mood and tear down a house or kill somebody."

"Bring him out so that we can know him!" A rock came crashing through the window.

"Maybe you better talk to them," said Sluggo nervously.

"Who, me?" replied the old man, visualizing his anus being violated by about forty throbbing dicks.

"Well, at least they know you. You can talk to them," said Sluggo.

"Uh...yeah, right...hmm." The old man hoisted himself up to his full height of five feet, two inches, strode to the door, opened it, and stood in the doorway. A chorus of cat-calls went up. The sons of Belial were carousing in the dirt, showing off their hard-ons, drinking home-made wine, hanging from the branches of trees, and imitating the calls of every known animal. The moon was full. "Now, see here, boys," he said. "Why don't you have your fun somewhere else? That fellow is my guest, and he don't want to come out. And he's an important guy with big connections."

"WE'LL GIVE HIM A BIG CONNECTION! YA-HAA!"

"Now, hold on, boys. He just ain't your type. But I'll tell you what. You can have my virgin daughter--"

"BLECHH!" "VOMIT!" "OINK!"

"Or...or...the guy's concubine! She's a real doll!"

"DROP DEAD! WE WANT THE GUY!"

Sluggo, hearing all this, figured he had just one chance to get out of it, so he grabbed Nadine by the arm and came out to face the crowd. They quieted down momentarily because they had never before seen a piece like her. She was enough to make them want to be straight. "You guys can have my concubine! Do anything you want with her!" announced Sluggo, forcing a smile intended to signify generosity.

"Thanks a lot, you bastard," muttered Nadine drunkenly.

"Believe me, you'll like her better than me! I've got a disease! A real bad disease! Besides which, I can really do things for this town! You know, put in a good word with the big boys!" He lifted Nadine's sweater up. "Look at them knockers! Now, can you resist that? And the rest of her is even better!"

"AW-RIGHT!" the sons of Belial shouted in unison. And Sluggo pushed her into the arms of the degenerates and ducked back into the house with the old man and locked the door.

"Whew! We got out of that one!" said Sluggo.

"Will the dear girl be all right?" asked the old man. Clifford let out a contemptuous snort and opened another beer.

"Aw, she's big enough to take it," said Sluggo. "She's been around, if you know what I mean....Hey, turn on the tube."

So they watched TV and drank and tried to ignore Nadine screaming outside as she was fucked in all orifices by the sons of Belial. At one point (during a Buick commercial featuring Vikings arriving at an opera) the old man sighed wistfully and remarked, "This used to be a nice neighborhood -- until *they* moved in. They don't have no respect for basic values. But what're you going to do, right? The world's changing."

"Exactly," agreed Sluggo. "What can you do? Nothing... Say, is there any wrestling on?"

"Go ahead and see," said the old man.

Sluggo turned the dial until he found a channel with wrestling. "Hey, there's that guy, the Messiah. He's such a wimp. I love it when he lets everyone beat the crap out of him....Oh, *this guy*, lookit! It's the Fuehrer! He's great!

He's small, but he don't have to fight because he's got all these goons around him to do his fighting for him. And then after he wins, he gives these great speeches in German, and everyone goes crazy, even if they don't understand it. Sometimes he tag-teams with this wop named Il Duce. I also like the mud wrestling with the naked women amputees with big tits and an arm or a leg missing. That's kinky as hell."

"I haven't seen that," said the old man. "My daughter and me usually just watch the news and go to bed right after."

They watched TV and drank beer until very late. The noise outside had tapered off somewhat as the sons of Belial gradually wore themselves out, but those in the house could still hear it. Whenever Nadine let out a shriek, they would grin at each other nervously and say something like, "Boy, some party," or "Bet she'll be sore tomorrow."

The old man, his daughter, and Clifford went to sleep in the wee hours of the morning. Sluggo stayed up a while longer watching religious shows and shows about starving children in Ethiopia. He used the TV's earphones to keep from disturbing the others and to block out the noise outside. When he finally hit the sack, it was close to dawn and it was quiet outside.

Nadine continued to get fucked long after she passed out. In her last moment of consciousness she vowed to give up this way of life, go back home, and get a job as an esthetician.

Sluggo woke up around mid-morning, before the others, and remembering Nadine, he went to the door and opened it. There was his concubine out cold on the doorstep. He nudged her with his foot and said, "Come on, Nadine, get your ass in gear. We got to get going." But Nadine did not awaken. *What a bummer*, thought Sluggo. He felt her pulse. *Oh, shit. She's dead*. He picked her up clumsily and managed to drag her to the shed and dump her in the sidecar of his bike. When he came back inside, he found the others awake and said for the old man's benefit, "Nadine's going to sleep it off. She's on the bike....Well, we got to be going, Doc." And after they shook hands all around and parted at the door, Sluggo said in Clifford's ear, "*She's dead. Don't say nothing.*"

"Oh, wow, *what a drag*," said Clifford, deeply moved.

They squished Nadine's body down as much as possible and tucked a sheet around her so as not to attract attention on the road. As they drove off, Sluggo made a mental note to

give Gibeah a miss the next time he had to pass through this part of the country.

By the time they got to Sluggo's house, Nadine's body was so rigid they had to break her legs to pry her out. Sluggo carried her into the house and laid her on the kitchen table, saying over and over, "What a drag" and "What a bummer," while Clifford consoled him by saying, "Those are the breaks" and "You'll find another broad."

The whole thing put Sluggo in a weird mood, and he was pretty stressed out to begin with inasmuch as he hadn't had a proper sleep or even a cup of coffee, for that matter. And for some unexplainable reason -- perhaps a protest against cruel Fate, I don't know -- he got out a big knife and cut Nadine's body into twelve parts. And later he took these pieces and drove around and dropped them on all the coasts of Israel. Levites could get away with such things in those days and no charges were ever pressed, although reasonable people today would disapprove.

From that day on, the town buzzed with excited talk. In the mental hospital they said things like, "Super coola!" and "Far over!" for they felt truly inspired by this demonstration of the possibilities of human will. And so did the patients.

And wherever the townsfolk got together to chew the fat -- in bars, pool halls, laundromats, general stores, and so on -- this singular event became the sole topic of conversation, for it had brought real wonder for the first time to their otherwise tedious existence.

THE MAN WHO DIED OF HIS OPINIONS

"It's an extraordinary case, Lescano, most extraordinary. In fact, I should call it unique. And as heretical as it may be for a doctor to say it -- but here I can be frank with an old friend and colleague like yourself -- this case runs contrary to all the experience of the medical profession."

My host, Dr. Motta, a long-time friend, was escorting me through the neat white corridors of the Sanatorium della Santa Vittoria, of which he was both the founder and director. The corridors had the faint smell of a new coat of paint, along with the familiar antiseptic smell of such institutions. A few nurses and orderlies could be seen going about their tasks, and a few visitors greeted Dr. Motta as we passed. The atmosphere was brighter and airier than in the city hospitals. There were even paintings on the walls, some of them done by patients. Dr. Motta had founded the sanatorium, located in the peaceful and picturesque outskirts of the town of Valdana, ten years before. It had the most modern facilities for the latest therapies used in the treatment of nervous disorders. Dr. Motta had chosen the specialty of neurology after completion of his medical degree in Rome, where we were classmates and best friends. I had gone into general practice and was a consultant at a private clinic in Siena, the sort of place that attracted wealthy hypochondriacs.

"Your letter certainly piqued my curiosity," I replied to my friend. His letter had been sketchy in detail but urgent and secretive in tone. *"You must come and see this for yourself,"* he had written.

"I prayed that you'd be able to get away for a few days, Lescano. After all, on such short notice, and considering your own work, it's really good of you."

"My dear fellow, I wouldn't have done it for anyone else. But I don't know if I can be of any help to you. After all, I'm not a specialist in neurology, and I can think of several better-qualified men who--"

"No, no, the matter is much too delicate! You know the

jealousies of specialists. There are many neurologists who would love to turn this case into a farce to make me look ridiculous. I've devoted myself completely to this sanatorium, and at times I feel like a knight defending my fortress against a tribe of barbarians. Every time I publish an article about my experiments in hypnotherapy, for instance, or vitamin therapy, my critics gleefully jump at the chance to attack my methods."

"Reactionaries," I remarked.

"Yes, but not without influence."

We turned a corner, and Dr. Motta showed me into his office, a bright and uncluttered room with large windows facing west, through which I could see gentle green hills with contrasting patches of cultivated land. To one side was a small grove of plum trees. A few white cottages could be seen beneath the benevolent sun of late spring. For a moment I longed to be out there hiking along a flowery path, completely untroubled by the world's increasing complexities, as I used to do as a schoolboy with my dog, Foxy. How the adult world steals from us our simple pleasures!

"Have a seat, Lescano," said my host. "Will you have some brandy with me?...Good. I have an excellent brandy here." He poured me a glass and then sat behind his desk and picked up a cream-colored folder similar to the ones in my own office in Siena. He opened it and picked up the top page. "The patient is a Signor Ponza, age sixty. He comes from Foggia. He was originally diagnosed as a manic-depressive but without the depressive phase. His symptoms were irritability, insomnia, and occasional outbursts of hysteria. Otherwise, the medical history is normal. He arrived here two months ago, and although I had doubts about the original diagnosis, I began treating his symptoms with drugs and hydrotherapy -- with some success, I might add. However, his case struck me as odd from the outset. For instance, his metabolic tests, particularly blood chemistry, did not coincide with what is known about manic disorders. And there were other peculiarities, such as slightly elevated spinal fluid pressure, asymmetry of reflexes, irregular brain waves, sensitivity to light...." He turned the page. "...Some queasiness of the stomach, occasional dizziness, loss of appetite, strange tastes in the mouth, sudden rashes....In short, it was a constellation of symptoms that made no sense, although my instinct told me that it was something of a neurological nature. Then a week ago, just before I wrote to you, he was

stricken with an apparent paralysis of the legs. I say apparent because while he has normal sensation in the legs, he has no motor function."

"Psychosomatic paralysis?" I suggested, although I doubted it.

"If it were truly psychosomatic, he would have no sensation. Furthermore, there's nothing about this man to support such a conclusion."

"Hmm..." I sipped my brandy. "I don't think I've ever heard of anything so strange."

"The whole thing didn't add up, Lescano. I could find no similar case in any of the books. And then a thought struck me." Dr. Motta closed the folder and looked me squarely in the eye. "I know you're a skeptical man, Lescano, but don't laugh at what I'm about to say."

"My dear Motta, I would never laugh at anything you might say to me -- provided, of course, that you were being serious."

"I'm being entirely serious, I assure you." He leaned back and settled himself more comfortably in his chair. "Do you remember the classes in neurology we took with old Professor Serra?"

"Yes," I replied, with a smile of fond recollection. "You were something of a thorn in his side with your, shall we say, *imaginative* questions. Nevertheless, I'm sure he liked you."

"I believe he did. Do you remember the day I posed a question that caused all the other students to burst into laughter?"

"I can remember more than one occasion. Which one are you referring to?"

"I'm referring to the question regarding the brain's capacity becoming fully saturated."

"Oh, that one!" I began to laugh and then caught myself. "Sorry, dear chap....Ahem, yes, I remember that day. Dear old Serra was lecturing on the memory capacity of the brain and how human beings go through life using scarcely a tenth of the brain's capacity. And then you interrupted him and asked...I forget your exact words....The gist of it was, what would happen if a human being literally filled his brain with information, totally saturating its capacity....Would he have to begin forgetting things to make room again...or would he break down mentally....Something to that effect."

"Yes. You've a good memory, Lescano. And Professor

Serra -- after the laughter had subsided -- calmly stated that such a circumstance was unthinkable because no human being could ever fill the capacity of his brain, not even a genius like Isaac Newton. Do you remember how he remarked, 'Don't worry, Signor Motta, there will always be room in your head to learn something new.'"

"I believe some of us teased you about that afterwards."

"You're forgiven. But now it appears that my question was not so preposterous after all." He rested his hands on the folder before him.

"You don't mean to say...Signor Ponza?"

"Yes, Lescano. Of course, it's only a hypothesis. I can't prove it. But I'm now convinced that Ponza is such a case."

"But is Ponza a scholar? Has he an advanced education?"

"Quite the opposite. The man is an ignoramus. He's had only a few years of schooling and has worked all his life at menial jobs."

"Then how...I don't quite...I'm afraid you'll have to explain."

Dr. Motta leaned forward again, his expression bearing a hint of sly humor. "This man Ponza is, as I've just said, an ignorant man. In fact, a fool of the worst sort. However, what he has, Lescano, is *opinions*."

"Opinions? About what?"

"About everything imaginable. About things he knows nothing about. The man has more opinions than the entire Academy of Sciences. He has more opinions than you'll find in the Chamber of Deputies. He has more opinions than all the village know-it-alls and gossips in the entire country. What I'm driving at -- and I won't blame you for laughing, Lescano -- is that Ponza has saturated, or very nearly saturated, his brain's capacity...with *opinions*." He sat back and waited for my reaction.

I took another sip of brandy and cleared my throat before replying. "Well...my dear Motta...it seems to me that the difficulty with your hypothesis is that opinions are not facts. They're not information."

"Ah! But can a brain cell tell the difference?" he said excitedly. "That's the point! A fact is something learned and stored in the brain. An opinion is not a fact, you're quite right. But the hallmark of the ignoramus is that he does not -- he *cannot* -- distinguish a fact from an opinion. To him, his opinions *are* facts. And while factual knowledge

takes some effort to acquire, the ignoramus generates opinions effortlessly, spontaneously. He can stuff his brain with nonsense ten times faster than any scholar can absorb knowledge."

"Hmm...interesting." I had to admit my friend might be on to something. "But does your hypothesis explain the symptoms? Even if a man's brain were saturated, would that paralyze his legs, for instance, or lead to the other symptoms in Ponza's case?"

"Why not, Lescano? If the hypothesis is true, then Ponza has already disproven one of the firmest assumptions of neurology. After that, all bets are off, as the Americans say. In other words, anything goes. Ponza's symptoms are so inconsistent with any other diagnosis, I'm left only with the explanation that they are the effects of a brain that is simply breaking down neurologically."

I scratched my ear and looked out the window. A cloud had temporarily cast a shadow over the hillside. "Have you discussed this with any of your colleagues here?"

He sighed. "I took my closest associate into my confidence. However, he disagreed with me completely. I shouldn't have said anything. I can't blame the fellow. It's quite a fantastic idea. But I intend to say no more about it. Officially, the original diagnosis will be allowed to stand, although the staff understands that it is just for lack of anything better."

I finished the last of my brandy. "I should like very much to meet this Signor Ponza myself."

"And so you shall, Lescano!" He stood up. "Follow me."

My friend led me to a small private room at the end of one wing of the sanatorium. The moment he opened the door, the rasping voice of Ponza doused me like muddy water splashed by a passing car. "Don't you dare defame the noble name of Mussolini!"

The nurse, who was adjusting his pillow for him, interjected timidly, "I assure you, Signor, I never--"

"Mussolini was the Caesar of the Twentieth Century! Why shouldn't he have invaded Ethiopia? What good are the Ethiopians anyway? They're not even Christians! They're heathens! They eat cats and dogs! I know! Mussolini was a man of vision, a man of action! He made the trains run on time! Why, in the old days you'd wait an hour for a late train, and no explanation given either! Not a word of apology! No one would say, 'Very sorry for the delay, ladies and gentlemen. An unfortu-

nate circumstance. Quite beyond our control.' No, none of that! And the seats! The most damnably uncomfortable seats in the world! And there you'd sit, all cramped and stuffed, and after paying good money for third-class passage! Meanwhile, the world is going to hell, and when a great figure strides forward to rise above the crowd and say, 'Enough!' is he given his due by the rascals who write the history books? No! I tell you, the men who control the world are no better than anyone else, just lucky enough to have been born into the right families! Underneath their fine clothes they have dirt between their toes the same as you and I! I know! I've worked as a janitor in the Prefecture offices! Six long years tidying up behind them, carrying up their boxes, running errands, and what do they do to earn their salaries? Push a few pieces of paper around, dictate a letter, drink whisky with the upper crust, that's all! I know! I've mingled with the highest and the lowest of this world! I know what a man is made of just by looking at him! And you can take your fancy degrees--"

"I have no degrees, Signor," interjected the nurse.

"--And put them you-know-where! *Ptooh!*"

Dr. Motta interrupted Ponza's tirade. "Good day, Signor Ponza. How are we feeling today? A bit better perhaps?"

"Ach! You doctors! You haven't the slightest idea of what you're doing! I complain that I'm dizzy, and you put me in a tub of warm water! I tell you my blood's running too fast, and you give me a yellow pill I can't even pronounce! Why, they would laugh at you where I come from! Ha! In the old days the village doctor took one look at you, put his ear to your chest -- didn't even need a stethoscope, mind you -- and pronounced his diagnosis! And he was always right! And he could do the same thing with a horse or a pig! It made no difference! Why, you can learn more from a sick horse than you can from all those dusty textbooks in the Medical Academy! And my dear old doctor, when he was alive he could play the violin, too! Better than *whatsisname*, Puccini, or whatever! But now, what was I saying when you came in? This fool of a nurse here says the statue in the town square is a fine statue! Well, I know about statues! Look at the statues Mussolini erected! A man a thousand years ahead of his time! Statues that children can look up to and know the meaning of heroism!...Well, now, who is this?"

"This is my friend and colleague, Dr. Lescano, from Siena."

"*Ooh...Siena!*" Ponza said sarcastically. "*Ooh...with*

their *very proper* Italian, don't you know! None of that plain, down-to-earth talk! Oh, no, we're too good for that in Siena! I'll bet you're a Socialist, aren't you, sir? Don't bother to answer. I can tell by the way you cut your hair. One learns these things hanging around the Prefecture." I smiled indulgently, as if conceding the point to Ponza. "Well, let me say a thing or two about the Socialists! The Socialists are the false prophets spoken of in the Bible! The Anti-Christ will be a Socialist, count on that!" He put his hand to his forehead momentarily. "Ach, no one listens...no one listens...I know...Where is my Bible?" He looked about him. "Ah, here it is...You see this book, gentlemen? This is the only book in the world anyone needs to read! And why? Because it comes from God! And God is smarter than any man, isn't that so? Don't bother to answer. I've proved my point. I have never read any other book in my life, and do you know why? Because truth is not in any other book! No, sir! Why, one writer gets some idea in his head, and before the sun goes down he's written a whole book on it! And then another writer has to disagree, so he writes his own book! And the third fellow insists on showing up both of them, so he has to write one of his own! And so on. There's no end to it. And what's the good of it? If these gentlemen are so learned, why haven't they solved the problems of the world? Tell me that, why don't you, Dr. whatever-your-name-is. You have no answer, do you? You see, that proves my point!..." During his rantings, I had casually picked up Ponza's chart and was dividing my attention between it and him. I noticed that Ponza's temperature had been fluctuating, even falling below normal at times. I also noticed that since the day before, all medications had been replaced by placebos. My friend, Dr. Motta, had evidently decided there was no point giving him any more real medication. "...And wasn't the Spanish Inquisition divinely inspired? Why do these atheists slander the Church? Aren't the Spaniards devout enough? Why, I knew a Spaniard once. Quite a fine fellow, he was. Wore a cross at all times and had such a pious expression at every moment. Why, anyone could tell that he had a godly soul. He was a fish merchant, if I remember correctly. Yes, that's it. Pilchards. He knew all there was to know about pilchards. It's on shoulders like those that the Church has been built! The Spaniards make the best shoes, too, did you know that? Take it from me. The Americans practically kill to get their hands on Spanish shoes! I know! The Spaniards learn about shoes from the earliest age! It's in their

blood! Take a pair of Spanish-made shoes and it will last a lifetime! Not like those horrible French shoes that pinch your feet so you can't even walk! It all comes down to construction! Making things that last! I was telling this silly woman about architecture..." He closed his eyes and grimaced momentarily.

"Are you in pain?" asked Dr. Motta.

"No...not pain exactly...I...I've been feeling so odd...so odd...Doctor, where am I?" Ponza looked at us with wide, confused eyes.

"You're in the Sanatorium della Santa Vittoria, outside of Valdana," he replied calmly.

"Valdana? Valdana?...Yes...Of course...Tell me, it's not Easter today, is it?"

"No, it isn't," replied Dr. Motta.

"No, of course...How stupid of me..." Ponza looked at his hands, then felt his cheeks, and then let his eyes wander across the ceiling for a few seconds. "I keep imagining the strangest thing, Doctor."

"What's that?"

"I keep imagining...a beehive...And there are so many bees that there isn't enough room for them all in the hive..." Dr. Motta and I exchanged silent looks. "And as soon as one bee forces his way in, why, another bee gets bumped out to make room. And all the bees get very angry...But what was I talking about just a moment ago? The Inquisition?"

"You were about to discuss architecture," I volunteered.

"Ah, yes! That must be why I suddenly thought of the beehive. Well, after all, bees are the greatest architects in the world, aren't they? Look at how well they make their hives! But as far as buildings go, you must admit that Roman architecture was the most superior." He was addressing this remark to me.

"Perhaps, Signor. I've really no firm opinion on the subject."

"Well, take it from me, I know! Just go tramping around those old ruins and see how well they're made! Of course, the Romans got their ideas from the Greeks, while the Greeks got theirs from the, um, Babylonians, while the Babylonians no doubt borrowed from the Egyptians. Now, I ask you, did a pyramid ever collapse? Never! That proves my point! The classic idea, carried across the oceans of time, like, um, like a great bird...perhaps a hawk...carrying a large fish to feed its young. You don't have to be taught such things, you only

have to think about them. This is how the great ideas get preserved. The great leaders are the ones with the great ideas. Like Mussolini! He was greater than Hitler! Hitler was a lunatic and, what's more, he listened to Wagner all the time, such horrible stuff! No, give me Verdi any day, those fine operas with great singing and fine stories! *La la la-la!* Wonderful stuff, eh? Such things come from God! That's why the Inquisition was a good thing! It fought the Devil, and they were all for good music, too! They ought to bring it back, if you ask me! Especially with the way the youngsters carry on these days! No morality at all! And their half-baked intellectual ideas on top of that! All their machines and high speed and trying to change the world! Why, the average peasant on his donkey knows more of life than...than..." Ponza seemed to go into a mild seizure. Dr. Motta felt his pulse and put a hand to his forehead but did not seem greatly alarmed. "Speed...speed..." mumbled Ponza. "A bee can see quite well at low speed because it has a hundred eyes...A bee doesn't need machines...Get rid of the machines...We can live with our donkeys...A hawk flying with a Spanish pilchard for Mussolini ...I must buy some Spanish shoes...The Socialists won't let me...They're against Spanish shoes...I know...I know..." And he let out a deep breath and closed his eyes.

Dr. Motta put his stethoscope to Ponza's chest for a moment, then straightened up. "He's fallen asleep, that's all.Nurse, just stay with him and keep taking his vital signs every hour."

"Yes, Doctor," said the nurse. "He's worse today, you know. He's more mentally confused than ever. And before you came in he was using some very rude language."

"Yes, yes, it's to be expected," said Dr. Motta.

The nurse's hands were clenched anxiously. "Everyone on the staff is talking about Signor Ponza, Doctor."

"Yes, Nurse."

"They say he has...a new illness...something never before seen...And I've been a nurse for twenty years and I've never--"

"Yes, yes, Nurse. Signor Ponza is a little bit unusual. I must ask you to refrain from spreading rumors. We have other patients to think of, and we don't want to put fears in their heads."

"Yes, Doctor."

I patted poor Ponza's arm in pity. At least he did not seem to be in pain. Perhaps if he was destined to die, it

would happen peacefully, in his sleep.

"Come, Lescano. You can escort me on the rest of my rounds."

"Yes, by all means," I replied. My last sight of Ponza was of his pale, sagging cheeks as the nurse tucked his sheet neatly up to his chin.

When we were in the corridor again, Dr. Motta said, "My dear fellow, do me the honor of staying with me at my house for a few days. I feel that Ponza's case has reached its critical stage and all will be resolved in a very short time."

"I'd be delighted, dear chap. Then you think Ponza hasn't much longer to live?"

"If my hypothesis is correct, he could go at any time."

Dr. Motta and I made the rounds of the sanatorium and said no more about Ponza.

Later that evening, after we had had a good dinner and were relaxing in the study with our cigars and cognac, I brought up the subject of Ponza again. "The thought that nags me is this: is Ponza truly the first case of this sort, or have there been others? And what's become of them?"

Dr. Motta raised his head and blew a leisurely cloud of smoke into the air. "I was wondering when you'd get around to that question," he said. "I believe that there have been other cases like Ponza." He sipped his cognac and pursed his lips in satisfaction. "Perhaps a few, perhaps many, who knows? And when they died, as I believe they must have done, no one knew the true cause. They were probably written off as cases of heart failure or some such thing."

"You realize, of course, that this would turn the medical profession upside-down if you were to reveal your discovery in one of the journals! Imagine the astonishment--"

"No, no!" he said quickly. "I will do no such thing. No, what's the point? As I've said before, my claims would be met with ridicule, and it would be ten times worse than anything I've had to endure so far. You see, dear fellow, the theory is quite unprovable. I can think of no scientific test that would confirm the existence of such a thing as -- what shall we call it? -- the Ponza Syndrome." He chuckled at this. "And besides, what can be done for these sufferers? If it were merely a matter of finding a serum to combat a new strain of bacterium or developing a new surgical technique to get at a diseased organ, then there might be some hope. But you cannot do anything for the Ponzas of the world."

I sipped my cognac thoughtfully. My cigar had gone out,

I noticed. I tapped the cool ash against the side of the ash tray and reached for another match. "I suppose you're right. It's better that the world not know."

Signor Ponza died the following evening, just before midnight. Dr. Motta and I were summoned by the doctor on night duty but arrived too late. The final cause of death was heart attack, and that was all that would be stated on the death certificate. According to the nurse, Ponza had awakened from a restless sleep and began ranting about turnips and a Socialist conspiracy, then experienced an attack of tachycardia and simultaneous blindness. His last intelligible words were: "I know."

Signor Ponza's body was to have been sent back to Foggia, but his only living relative refused to pay for the transportation. His curt telegram read: "*WILL NOT PAY. HAVE NO INTEREST IN MATTER.*" There was nothing to be done but to have Ponza buried in Valdana.

I attended the service at the grave site, along with Dr. Motta, a few other staff members, and some local peasant women who attended all funerals as a pastime and wept copiously for strangers they had never met. The town priest, a serious young man named Father Arturo, gave a rather peculiar eulogy and appeared somewhat nervous. He seemed to confine himself to statements of fact about the deceased and expressed the hope that his soul was now at peace among the angels. As the casket was lowered into the ground, I thought, *Here lies a man dead with all his opinions.*

After my return to Siena, I exchanged several letters with Dr. Motta about the Ponza Syndrome, as he called it, but neither of us was able to find any other such cases or to develop his hypothesis any further. Nature had permitted us to view briefly a rare and mysterious event and had then promptly shut the door again. The only noteworthy postscript passed along to me concerning Ponza was that a few weeks after his burial, a spectacular number of worms came out of the grave site, and that thereafter not the tiniest flower, nor the most insignificant weed, nor even the thinnest blade of grass would ever grow there.

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ひげそりは肌が良く乾いた状態でお始め下さい。
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とくに湿気の多い所でお使いになったり、今までの方式からフィリシェーブ方式に変えられた当初はブリシェーブローションをお使いになると効果的です。

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